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Chairman Of the Contras

Nicaragua's Adolfo Calero, Taking Care of Business

By James Conaway

DONT EXPECT to find sunglasses, sweaty fatigues or bandoleers on the Supreme Commander of the Nicaraguan Democratic Force, better known as the "contras." Adolfo Calero, a leader of Central American counterrevolution, came to Washington yesterday wearing a three-piece pin-striper, a red, white and blue tie and a Notre Dame class ring.

When the punch bowl on the luncheon table at the Johns Hopkins School for Advanced International Studies split in half during his remarks about Sandinista calumny, spilling ice cubes all over the fresh linen, Calero didn't dive for the wall-to-wall carpeting. He reached for the fruit compote.

Third World politics has acquired a corporate sheen. Calero's advance man also wears pin stripes and hands out contra brochures that bear some resemblance to an annual report, complete with the smiling photographs of members of the FDN's National Directorate. (The CIA's contribution of millions was not listed among the assets.) Calero spoke with gravelly conviction, and the students listened. A few years ago even such an avuncular right-winger would have been driven from most American campuses.

"Times are changing," said a faculty member. "The Reagan administration has been hermetically sealed, so the contras have had to come forward and speak for themselves. They're no longer a clandestine organization, and they're no longer afraid of hostile audiences."

Calero held a press conference after the luncheon, complete with the revelation that the contras had just destroyed a radio tower in Nicaragua being used by Salvadoran rebels. How? a student asked. "A Piper Baron might have been involved," Calero said mysteriously, referring to contra aircraft that fly from secret tarmacs in Honduras. "We should be learning more about it in the coming hours."

He raises money privately here and in other countries. When Calero isn't in jungly border areas, he's in Bogotá, Caracas, Mexico City or Washington. Though his cause seems to have languished in recent months, he claims to have a fighting membership in Nicaragua of

17,000 souls, including the Miskito Indians on the northern coast.

"According to the feedback we have," he said, "the Nicaraguan people are very happy with our attacks . . . Their temperature rises with our successes and goes down when they don't hear about us."

The Sandinistas lie, he said, when they claim to have the support of the people. "If you have two donkeys, then you are a member of the bourgeoisie."

The Sandinistas have substituted the word "Sandino" for God in the Lord's Prayer, he added, and tried unsuccessfully to introduce Marx into the curriculums of parochial schools.

"This government will fall the same way the Somoza government fell. From international pressure, and pressure from the army."

Asked if he would support direct intervention by the United States, Calero said, with careful ambiguity, "The fight for democracy transcends international boundaries . . . We are a proud people, we can take care of our own problems. If the Sandinistas hadn't received so much help from the Soviets and the Cubans, we would be fighting our own war."

He earned a graduate degree in business administration at Notre Dame and owned some hotels, along with a Coca-Cola franchise, in Nicaragua. He opposed Somoza, and spent time in prison because of it. That earned him no kudos from the Sandinistas, since he led the Conservative Democratic Party that opposed them.

The Sandinistas are no different from the Somozas, Calero says. "The Sandinistas have done what Eric Hoffer says many vic-

tims tend to do—build themselves in the image of their oppressor. What is the phrase? *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.*"

The army under the Sandinistas, however, is about five times as big. That makes Nicaragua's neighbors testy. "There can be no economic progress with such a Marxist threat," Calero added. "Central America could turn into another Biafra."

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